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8. The Revolution is Religious

Religion, Peace, and New Public Spheres in Colombia

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Abstract

This article considers the construction of new and alternative publics in Colombia following the 2016 Peace Accords. Through practices of reconciliation based on collective economic practices, and the moral imperatives that motivate them, this paper traces the discourses and practices of belief that sustain the possibility of peaceful publics in Colombia. Specifically, this essay considers the ways new publics and counter-subjectivities are being created, among others, by communities of victims and former guerrilla combatants in the southwestern region of Colombia. These initiatives to “create anew” emerge as strategies to generate innovative social, political and, above all, economic relations aimed at territorial restoration amid ongoing violence, and to further generate conditions of peacebuilding. Whereas civil wars annihilate the plural public sphere, peace requires multiple publics that are committed to reimagined social relations and economic structures that serve the public good, and guarantee that debate, conflict, disagreement, and negotiation can occur without the use of violence.

Keywords: Colombia, Peace Accords, restorative justice, public sphere, religion, belief

Introduction

We will not let any act of violence dim the desire for change that all Colombians share.
(Senator Ivan Cepeda, Colombia)

Without new visions we don't know what to build,
only what to knock down.
We not only end up confused, rudderless, and cynical,
but we forget that making a revolution is not
a series of clever maneuvers and tactics
but a process that can and must transform us.
(Robin Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 2002)

“The revolution is *profoundly* religious!” Alfredo¹ clapped my shoulder in the back of the Land Rover as we bumped along a dirt road in the department² of the Cauca Valley, a region of Southwestern Colombia. Alfredo is a former FARC-EP (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army) commander, and we were having a conversation about religious studies on our way down the mountain from a visit with the demobilized camp of former combatants. Together with researchers from the Universidad Javeriana-Cali’s Institute for Intercultural Studies and members of the Research Group on Social Movements, Interculturality, and Peace Building, we had spent the morning with Alfredo, who the Javeriana team has been accompanying since the early days of the demobilization of FARC combatants in 2017. He was curious about the fact that I was a professor of religion and told me his *nom de guerre* had been Nider, taken from the fifteenth century Dominican theologian and reformer, Johannes Nider. Nider (the Reformer) had written extensively on the problem of witchcraft and diabolism, as well as one of the first works of economics to be printed, *On the Contracts of Merchants/De Contracatibus Mercatorum* – perhaps the first work published on business ethics in the Western world concerned primarily with strategies for merchants on going about business without risking their eternal souls in the process (Wrenn 2000).

Interested, we asked about the name and Alfredo made this pronouncement—that the revolution is religious. He understood himself as a reformer, and that the revolution is profoundly religious, but that religious fanaticism, fundamentalism of any militant form, must be tempered. Rather, belief in the possibility of a just world was the religio-ethical construction that he had encouraged his subordinates to commit to while commander in the FARC-EP. And now, in the wake of the historical peace agreement, the revolution continued for Alfredo, but without war. This was the hope. This was the belief. And for Alfredo, the peaceful revolution was entrepreneurial.

Becoming economically sovereign and autonomous, for the communities of former guerrilla combatants that Alfredo represents, developing *la empresa comunitaria* (communal enterprise) and *industria comunitaria* (communal industry) are the social and economic forms to which Alfredo aspires. Alfredo is leading a group of former guerilla combatants in establishing

¹ All names of collaborators have been changed to pseudonyms to protect identities and communities.

² Comparable to a “state” in the United States.

a variety of entrepreneurial initiatives including poultry production, pork farming, ranching, fish farming, and horticulture, together with farmers and producers from communities that have historically been victims of the armed conflict: campesino³ organizations, Afro-Colombian groups, and Indigenous communities. Over 1,000 families are represented in the community Platform of Social Organizations (the Platform) that Alfredo is a member of, and he works closely with Indigenous, campesino, and Afro-Colombian leaders to collectively develop programs for economic and political autonomy.⁴ The Platform is an emblematic exercise of peacebuilding in the country and supports a unique scenario for reconciliation through encounters between these victims' groups and perpetrators (reincorporated members of the FARC).⁵

As they develop this alternative vision for a cooperative economy, the group also enacts practices of reconciliation and holds space for sharing historical memory and truth telling.⁶

³ In June of 2023, the Colombian House of Representatives approved a legislative bill that recognizes the campesino population as “subjects of rights” and special protections. The definition of campesino has been a subject of long-standing debate in Colombia and throughout Latin America. The international movement, *Via Campesina*, defines itself an “international peasant movement,” suggesting campesino to be understood as “peasant farmer.” Their broader definition articulates a movement representing landless workers, women farmers, indigenous people, pastoralists, migrants, and agricultural workers from around the world. In Colombia a multi-year process that brought together academics and activists, through the Colombian Institute for Anthropology and History, developed a definition of *campesino* specific to the Colombian context. It reads: A campesino is an intercultural subject, identified as such [campesino], vitally involved in direct work with the land and nature, immersed in forms of social organization based in non-remunerated familial and community-based work and does not sell their labor” (Saade 2020, 19). This recognition places the campesino population in a similar legal category as Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities, providing them access to collective land rights, rights to cultural protections, and for the campesino rights to recognition of food sovereignty and agricultural production protections, as well as the guarantee of basic rights like water, education, and access to healthcare.

⁴ The International Cooperative Alliance defines “cooperative” as “people-centered enterprises owned, controlled, and run by and for their members to realize their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations” (ICA 1995). Importantly, cooperatives are alliances driven primarily by values, rather than profit, of self-governance, self-responsibility, equality, equity, and solidarity. In Latin America, cooperatives of small-scale agricultural production operate in response, and subversion, to mega agro-industrial development models that came into vogue through neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, and the mass movements of urbanization that accompanied the neoliberal turn (Vásquez-Léon, Burke, and Finan 2017).

⁵ The Platform is made up of a coalition of six community cooperatives from northern Cauca, representing over 1,000 families. The Platform operates as a large cooperative of agricultural producers who work in accordance to community-based economic models. Community-based economic models are organized via principles of relationship, complementarity, reciprocity, and co-responsibility (Acevedo et al. 2021). The six community cooperatives include two collectives of former FARC guerrilla combatants (Cooperative Multiactiva Ecomún La Esperanza del Pueblo [Coomeep] and Cooperative Ecomún La Esperanza [Cecoespel]); the Asociación Proyecto Nasa from the municipality of Toribío and the Indigenous Council (cabildo) of Pueblo Nuevo from the municipality of Caldono, representing Indigenous communities from the territory; the Regional Business Association for Northern Cauca Campesino Development (Asociación Gremial Regional para el Desarrollo Campesino Nortecaucano [Ardecán]), which brings together mestizo, Indigenous, and Afro-Colombian populations, and the Young Women’s Entrepreneurial Peacebuilders Association from the municipality of Caldono.

⁶ With the establishment of the National Center for Historical Memory of Colombia (2005) and later the Commission for the Clarification of the Truth, Co-living, and Non-Repetition (2017), Colombia’s efforts towards

These practices are rooted in social and solidarity-based economic principles and “inter-cooperation” that the Platform defines as “building the relationships between production, distribution, consumption, and financing based in justice, cooperation, reciprocity and mutual aid” (Acevedo Lasso, et al. 2023, 9). The principles that guide these economies of solidarity are i) commitment to social transformation; ii) criteria for democratic self-governance; iii) land understood as a subject of development and space for social cohesion; and iv) a commitment to processes of socioeconomic development endogenous to the territory (Acevedo Lasso, et al. 2023, 10–12).

Alfredo’s vision of communal industry means that all the profits from these businesses are distributed among the community members and re-invested in the construction of long-term housing, educational centers for former combatants and their families, healthcare services and infrastructure, and even potentially eco-tourist attractions. The proceeds will not be redirected to large, foreign corporations, nor will any small group capture the majority of profits, nor will community members be forced into debt in order to sustain their small enterprises.⁷ For Alfredo, the moral change that he envisions for this new economy is rooted in the idea that there is enough in Colombia for everyone. It is based in a discourse of abundance, not scarcity, with the clarification that for him Colombia’s war was (is) tied to its riches and their uneven distribution, not in a logic of lack.

This moral commitment is reflective of the call for new social, cultural, and moral imaginaries in contexts of peacebuilding amidst on-going conflict that John Paul Lederach has elaborated in his significant research on peacebuilding in war zones around the world. In this work, Lederach emphasizes that, in order for peace to be forged between former warring groups, society must surpass the dichotomy between skill and art, and the possibility to make peace defined as “the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist” (2005, ix). There is a deep theological undercurrent to Lederach’s work that attends to the fundamentally philosophical and existential question—not to mention a question that anthropologists and critical theorists have also considered—and that is: what is it to create meaning in the midst of violent conflict? What is the moral vision of a new society that drives communities and societies to re-imagine themselves in a peaceful future, even while dynamics of war persist?

This paper considers the construction of new and alter-publics (Fraser 1991) in the wake of Colombia’s peace accord of 2016 through collective economic practices and the moral

constructing collective and historical memory have been central to the nation’s efforts at peacebuilding. The importance of historical memory in processes of peace and reconciliation in contexts of on-going conflict, or post-conflict, has been widely considered by psychologists, historians, political scientists, and conflict resolution scholars. Central to this dimension of peacebuilding is the idea that memory is socially and collectively constructed (Halbwachs 1992), and in post-traumatic contexts, the importance of ritual spaces, collective actions of remembrance, and victims initiatives are central in recognizing victims’ voices in the construction of both official and non-official reports of violence and those responsible in order to service processes of transitional justice (Tamayo Gomez 2022; Riaño Alcalá and Victoria Uribe 2016; Neumann and Thompson 2015).

⁷ It should be noted that the Colombian government offered former combatants lines of credit to launch individual business enterprises, immediately yoking individuals attempting to reintegrate into civil society to the financial system and debts with interest (Martínez and Lefevbre 2019).

imperatives that motivate this labor. These new publics are being created by, amongst others, Alfredo and the community organizations that make up the Platform as a means to generate restorative social, political, and, importantly, economic relations in the midst of on-going violence in Colombia. The authors understand these alter-publics as manifestations of multi-dimensional and plural arenas of social organizing and political decision-making. To be clear, the conception of new publics brings into relief the formation of new political subjects, imagined from within social movements as forged through collective action, and through such collective action, these actors bring about new political practices in the public sphere. Following the work of Nancy Fraser who critiques Jürgen Habermas' original formulation of the "public sphere" as unitary, bourgeois, and exclusionary, we recognize that publics are inherently multiple and intersect in particular ways within any given society representing a variety of social, political, and economic actors and their interests (Fraser 1990; Habermas 1992a; 1992b).⁸ The re-imagining of a pluralistic public sphere that is independent of, or parallel to, state apparatuses and where public discourse is nurtured and encouraged, is the crux of peacebuilding. Foundational to the relevance of such imagining and construction of new publics in Colombia is the requirement that debate, conflict, disagreement, and negotiation can occur without the use of violence. Of fundamental importance to understanding the urgency of this process, one must recall that Colombia has been embroiled in a civil war for over five decades. Civil wars annihilate the public sphere through force and violence from state and non-state actors. Indeed, the grammar of terror that has sustained Colombia's war has been directly aimed at exterminating a democratic public sphere where multiple voices and opinions and strategies for just societies could inform each other (Uribe 2004). Peace demands multiple publics, engaged by economic structures that also serve the public good.

The work of the Institute for Intercultural Studies of the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana-Cali in accompanying the assemblage of such a new public realm is the window through which this essay examines the discourse and practice of moral economic imaginaries that lead to building alternate forms of social and political relations. The work of the Institute is part of multi-institutional efforts for building peace in Colombia, taken on by governmental and non-governmental bodies, regional, national, and international institutions, and civil society; many of these institutions and organizations have been carrying out this work for decades. The Institute, specifically, endeavors to create and coordinate scenarios for reconciliation and peace through the territorial reach of the university and through building bridges between diverse societal actors from communities, the state, and the private sector. Central to the work of the Institute is its focus on the rights of rural and marginalized communities through education for public engagement and political advocacy. Such is the grassroots work that is building new Colombian public spheres.

Throughout the narratives of peace building from a community commitment, discourses of abundance prevail and traverse the moral terrain of re-imagining economies from the margins and the construction of pluri-public spheres (Fraser 1990; Escobar 2020). We present a line of argument that is rooted in the community accompaniment that the Universidad

⁸ In his later work, Habermas (1992a; 1992b) acknowledges Fraser's critique and cedes that the democratic public sphere must necessarily be plural and permit space for multiple interests in discussion together.

Javeriana has undertaken over 7 years, in the wake of the historic peace agreement between the FARC and the Colombian government in 2016.⁹ After the Agreement was signed, organizations, communities, universities, international actors, and government bodies have engaged in the complicated, imperfect, and slow process of building the structures and relationships that (they hope) will allow peace to flourish. Central to these practices are discourses of enough-ness, of abundance, in the face of more classical economic logics of scarcity and hoarding, and discourses of hope in a new (re)public (not as in “state” but as in *res pública*, a public affair). We trace the discipline of hope,¹⁰ that struggles against and alongside the constant threat of terror that for so long has marked the Colombian public square. We illustrate the practices and acts of becoming that render people like Alfredo redeemed in some way, and firmly committed to the conviction that ethical economies are the route to sustainable peace.

For the Platform, and the Javeriana researchers that accompany it, the economic structures and models of Colombian political economy need to be re-imagined entirely in order for the peace agreement to be successful; economic inequality has prolonged the Colombian civil war since its beginning.¹¹ Indeed, rampant inequality and political exclusion were the catalysts for the formation of the FARC in 1964, resulting in violent repression from the Colombian state (Leech 2011; Londoño 2017). Economic injustice, in the form exclusion, indebtedness, and impoverishment, has been not only the consequence of civil armed conflict, but in fact a strategy of the war. The liberal free market system as it has been imposed in Colombia has required violence and inequality; as is the case in most capitalist societies. Economic structures that guarantee equitable distribution of land and wealth, access to

⁹ Colombia’s current wave of internal armed conflict is generally dated to 1948 with the assassination of liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitan, an act that spurred a bloody era in Colombian history known ambiguously as La Violencia, “The Violence.” The formation of the oldest guerilla movement in the world, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) began only years later, as a peasant guerrilla army that arose out of long-standing regional disputes, fresh memories of La Violencia, and the centralized, exclusionary political practices established by the political and economic elite in their efforts to quell the violence. In the wake of the establishment of FARC, numerous other smaller guerrilla armies and movements arose throughout the country, including the Movimiento 19 de Abril, the Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Liberation Army), and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (The Army of National Liberation). The development of the drug trade in the 1980s and its subsequent institutionalization within the furthest reaches of Colombian political economy led to the formation of paramilitary armies in the late twentieth century. The 2016 peace agreement between the government and the FARC has led to a tenuous ceasefire and a proliferation of discourse around the promise of a “new time.” It is a new time that suspends itself teleologically within a belief in the future. It is a vague promise of a new and peaceful country that is tied up with aspirations of economic development and prosperity. This peace agreement is also one of a series of agreements signed since the late 1980s with different armed actors, and differing degrees of success. See Bouvier 2009; Chaparro Rodríguez 2017; Pizarro 2017; Valencia Agudelo 2019.

¹⁰ The idea of “hope as a discipline” comes from U.S. abolitionist and anti-carceral activist Mariame Kaba. She says, “Hope doesn’t preclude feeling sadness or frustration or anger or any other emotion that makes total sense. Hope isn’t an emotion, you know? Hope is not optimism. Hope is a discipline . . . we have to practice it every single day” (2021, 7). In this way we understand discipline as practice, both external and social, rather than a form of internalized governmentality.

¹¹ There is a thick literature describing and analyzing the political economy of Colombia’s war and the role of economic structures, inequalities, and exclusions in the prolongation and exacerbation of the violence. See for example, Fergusson 2019; Kalmanovitz 2020; Rendón 2009.

education and equal opportunities, and sustainable economies that seek to alleviate long-term climate destruction, are the elements of economic re-organization that the Platform enacts. In this sense, the Platform's process of equalizing economic relations and designing communal and horizontal structures of decision-making is a direct challenge to the empty discourses of liberal democracy dictated by free market ideals. The new public spheres of shared governance and economic democratization that the Platform proposes rely on a collective belief that something yet incomplete can successfully transform society; as Lederach suggests, a common belief in something that does not yet exist is the groundwork for peace. Central to the argument of this paper, such practices of belief are fundamental for new publics to be forged that will usher in peaceable futures. Indeed, a new concept of society and the public sphere needs to be imagined altogether; and this is a practice of belief that operates as collective social practice, as opposed to a cognitive, internal process. Collective social practice is the domain of the public sphere and a way to understand the religious worlds embedded in social renewal.

The threats of on-going violence and warfare still stalk alongside the possibility of an ethical economy that serves the interests of the common good in Colombia. The Platform is committed to Colombia becoming peaceful through ethical business practice and roundly renouncing violence of all forms, including economic. Herein lies a profound shift, a moral change, inspired by both a religious tenor and commitment to econo-ethical possibility. For Alfredo, becoming peaceful means becoming ethically entrepreneurial according to a specific regime of practice and aspiration, based in a revolutionary imagining. Central to this regime of practice and aspiration is the figure of the "collective"—in other words, a new public. For the Platform, the new social and economic contract designed through a commitment to peace and just relations, is grounded in a public accountability and a public good. Mutual responsibility of all Platform members to each other is the ground in which justice is sown to harvest peace. Herein, the Christian legacies of rupture with the past and new heavens and new earths forged out of destruction of former worlds where injustice reigned, must not be overlooked (Robbins 2014). Belief in the "new" and the unseen undergird convictions of possibility.

The Public Commitment of a Private University

Historically, the southwestern region of Colombia, and especially the departments of Cauca and the Cauca Valley, have been sites of acute territorial conflict rooted in struggles over the use, access, and ownership of land. The conflict over land has been further deepened by competing models of development in the region. In the department of Cauca, for example, large swaths of productive land are concentrated in few hands and are exploited for forestry and lumber. Together with these concentrations of land used for logging, significant territorial sectors are split between agro-industrial production alongside recreational uses, and territories that had been acquired through illegal activities and have been seized by the government and remain government property or sold to groups, like communities of victims or re-incorporated former guerrilla members.¹² Yet another model of production in the region is based in small-

¹² This term in Spanish is called "bienes en extinción de dominio." One of the cooperatives of the Platform for Peace made up of ex-combatants working with Indigenous cooperatives and Afro-descendent organizations have been granted a few thousand hectares of arable land for agricultural production, ranching, and sustainable housing that had been land seized from a cartel boss.

scale agricultural economies developed by communities and through community processes (Duque et al. 2021).

The conflict over land has also been accompanied—and exacerbated—by the influence of illicit economies, primarily illegal mining and narco-agriculture via the cultivation of coca, opium, and marijuana.¹³ Herein lies another challenge, and the urgency, of designing new social contracts and models of development that work to overcome the inequity that has been occasioned by, and intensified through, decades of war and systemic violence.

In this context the Javeriana University in Cali, and their research group on Intercultural Dialogue, Social Movements, and Peacebuilding of the Institute for Intercultural Studies, has been closely involved in implementing education and economic programs for ex-FARC combatants in collaboration with victims' groups of Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities following the 2016 peace agreements in the surrounding areas of the departments of Cauca and Valle de Cauca. In other words, the members of the Institute are researchers as well as frontline, community-based peacebuilders, as are the community members they accompany. For example, Pueblo Nuevo is the only Indigenous community in Colombia that accepted not one, but two demobilization camps for former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) combatants on their reserve land. This Nasa Indigenous Reservation has been caught in the crosshairs of Colombia's war for decades. With the advent of the 2016 Peace Agreement, the community agreed to receive over 400 former combatants in their territories. In a conversation from June 22, 2023, the High Commissioner of the community's Indigenous Guard stated: "This is a territory of peace. We have experience in re-weaving social fabric through reconciliation. We understand the path to forgiveness" (interview with authors). Indigenous farmers from Pueblo Nuevo are now working in direct collaboration with former FARC combatants and their families, together with members of other Indigenous communities, peasant farmer collectives, and Afro-Colombian organizations from the region in a network of agricultural cooperatives that Colombia's tribunal for transitional justice has recognized as an initiative of restorative justice. The cooperatives cultivate fruits and vegetables, ranch cattle and other livestock, and produce coffee, honey, and other comestibles. The university provides training in sustainable agricultural development practices as well as possibilities for former combatants to complete primary and secondary education degrees. While many enterprising former FARC combatants have launched entrepreneurial initiatives throughout the country, no other initiative has entered into cooperative business partnership in the way the cooperatives that make up the Platform have, bringing together communities of victims working alongside former perpetrators of violence.

The work of the research group and the Platform has a different intention than only economic dividends, however. The work is trained on economics as a method towards social,

¹³ As Dermott O'Connor explains, while relatively few Colombians are directly involved in the drug industry, political economic evidence demonstrates that revenue from the drug industry seeps into "virtually all segments of the Colombian economy" (2009, 83). Narco-economics sustain diverse sectors of the Colombian economy through job creation, shady pyramid schemes and gambling institutions, and a host of small and large business investment. Drug money has also been laundered through political campaigns, propping up political figures from local municipal politics to the highest levels of power. Narco-industrialists also set up private militias for protecting infrastructures and in the services of foreign and domestic capital accumulation.

political, and cultural transformation in its peace work. In addition to training in agricultural development and small-business management, the university also facilitates a complex web of what they call “*juntanzas*” or “togetherness” of representatives from the diverse cultural and ethnic communities that make up the membership of the Platform. Alfredo has participated in many of these *juntanzas* and is committed to ethical economic development and community-based processes as central elements to the building of peace. In part, this is because in Cauca and Cauca Valley, economic inequality, the political economy of the war (including major drug and weapons trafficking as the region opens to the Pacific Ocean), and the decimation of local agricultural economies through take-overs of industrial agriculture, massive hydro-carbon and extractive projects, and coca and poppy production for the drug trade, have created such a perfect storm of inequality that economic recovery, and economics done differently, are essential for the survival of peace in the region.

To explain, for the last 60 years, Indigenous, Afro-descendent, and *campesino* populations have been disproportionately victimized by the civil armed conflict in Colombia, and nowhere more clearly than in the Cauca and Cauca Valley regions. The region is home to the second largest concentration of Indigenous populations and the largest Afro-descendent population in the country. According to the recent cumulative report from the Colombian Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Co-existence, and No-Repetition (Truth Commission): “Indigenous, Black, Afrocolombian, Raizal, Palenquera, and Roma communities and groups have suffered historical violence and are the populations most affected by the armed conflict, suffering not only violations to the right to life and individual integrity, but also violations of collective and cultural rights that have affected modalities of communitarian life and identity. This is a story that the country [Colombia] does not know and is part of a central obligation for the work of the [Truth] Commission” (Rincón García, et al. 2014, 29–30)

The work of the Javeriana brings all these groups together through various strategies of research, dialogue, popular education, political engagement, and community-based economic initiatives. For example, soon after the Peace Agreement was implemented, and the demobilized camps established in places like Pueblo Nuevo, the university brought together the leaders of the former FARC combatants, including Alfredo, together with local Indigenous leaders, Afro-Colombian leaders, and *campesino* leaders from the organizations in the region. The university brought the community leaders to Basque Country for a week of dialogue, facilitated in collaboration with University of Basque Country. The community leaders did not know who else would be at the workshop until they arrived. Individuals who had been mortal enemies now found themselves in the same room, with only words as their weapons and their defense. Thus began many years, and many more spaces for dialogue, confession, and forgiveness. This process of facilitating social dialogue allowed for trust to be built and barriers to be broken down, permitting collective re-imagining of the kind of peaceful society the represented groups wanted to work towards. Central to the collective re-imagining and negotiation that began through dialogue was the shared conviction that economics done ethically and collectively was necessary for peace to flourish. With the goal of re-making the public sphere as a shared site for cooperative action towards collective ideals of the good life, a dignified life, and an improved economic situation for all, the Platform was established.

Territorial Peace Building, Industrial Peace, and Victims

The logic that drives alternative visions of political economies as routes towards reconciliation is grounded in the unique nature of the peace agreement with the FARC-EP. The 2016 agreement is designed with characteristics that are particular to the Colombian context, although the blueprint for the agreement is based on the Good Friday Agreement/Belfast Agreement,¹⁴ and the National Peace Accord and Truth and Reconciliation Commission from South Africa. The political strategy forged by the ANC (African National Congress) provided some guidance for processes of transitional justice and the preservation of historical memory.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the Agreement formally known as the “Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace,” signed on November 24, 2016 includes distinctive features that have brought conflict resolution experts to declare the agreement as a “model” for other sites of protracted armed conflict, and one of the “most comprehensive” peace agreements to be signed in the twentieth or twenty-first centuries (Bouvier 2016; Barometer Initiative 2018). Three of the most notable elements in the peace accord are the emphasis on territorial peacebuilding, land reform, and the centering of the rights of victims.

One of the elements that sets the Colombian agreement apart is an emphasis on “territorial peacebuilding” that began to enter the public discourse through the logics of leading liberal proponents of a “statebuilding and peacebuilding” framework, championed initially by Sergio Jaramillo, the Colombian government’s High Commissioner for Peace. Jaramillo relied on the language of territorial peacebuilding to highlight one of the government’s positions that Colombia’s on-going armed conflict was in part the result of failed state institutions in remote and rural regions. Jaramillo and the Colombian government’s position in the development of the term, insisted that stronger institutional presence throughout the nation would generate allegiance between the state and local communities that would guarantee “practices and norms that regulate public life and produce wellbeing” (2014). Within this framework, territorial peacebuilding could be interpreted along the lines of capitalist models of expansion and extraction or mega-industrial development, as it was by the private sector and many conservative pundits, as a logic for securing territories that had historically been inaccessible to foreign direct investment or development because of the armed conflict. As Juan Carlos Echeverry, then president of Colombia’s largest oil producer, Ecopetrol, declared, “peace will allow us to extract more oil from zones that had been inaccessible because of the conflict” (El Espectador 2016).

This liberal or industrial peace follows the designs of many peace agreements established in the post-World War II era, with the intention of rebuilding the state according to political and economic architectures of liberal democracy and market economics (Baustista 2017). This

¹⁴ The Good Friday Agreement and the Belfast Agreement were signed in 1998 bringing an end to much of the ethno-nationalist violence of Northern Ireland’s “Troubles” that had plagued the country since the 1960s. See McGarry 2001; Coakley and Todd 2020.

¹⁵ The National Peace Accord, signed in 1991, brought an end to apartheid in South Africa and established a multi-party system that intended to re-formulate the constitution and institute mechanisms for controlling race-based and political violence in the nation. See Carmichael 2022; Gastrow 1995.

industrial peace harnesses discourses of capitalist growth and the rubrics of modernization and development as not only the dividends, but indeed sometimes the very intentions of peacebuilding. Within these structures of peacebuilding directed towards reorganizing economies towards market logics and broader neoliberal extension, the work for peace follows the logics of globalized markets, free enterprise, private property rights, market competition, profit, and capitalist ideals of accumulation and infinite growth, what Oliver Richmond (2013) refers to as “failed statebuilding” as opposed to “peace formation.” The assumption that lies at the heart of industrial peace, writes Colombian political scientist Sandra Bautista (2017), is that public life and social interaction, political and cultural economies, and agreements on social organization or rules of public engagement do not exist without the presence of state institutions. As Jaramillo (2014) stated, “we cannot repeat the error of thinking that [peace] is achievable through simply demobilizing some groups. We need to fill the space, institutionalize the territory, and everyone needs to be involved.” This idea of territories without formal or strong institutional state presence as “empty space” re-emphasizes the undercurrent that drives an industrial peace and the conceptualization of “territorial peacebuilding” from this perspective. This logic denies the reality of multiple social, cultural, and political assemblages that have been forged at the margins of state presence, in the midst of war, and despite both of these realities. Yet what is evident in Colombia, as Bautista, Alfredo, the researchers at the Javeriana, and numerous Colombian scholars insist, is that in regions of the country where the presence of the state has been scarce, or even a threat, numerous and diverse forms of social, political, and economic order have emerged outside of the hegemonic logics of the central state (Bautista 2017; Molano 2007; Archila et al., 2006). Indeed, Bautista suggests that these counter-state formations, these alter-publics, are representative of the social, economic, and political orders that flourish throughout Latin America. Argentinian legal scholar Mabel Thwaites (2012) refers to these formations as “the apparent State” where state apparatuses have been “characterized by the existence of diverse mechanisms of exclusion of certain population groups . . . to the degree that the national sovereignty of the State in its supposedly corresponding territories is an illusory condition, a fiction of juridical order” (Bautista 2017, 105). The work of the Platform for Peace in Cauca responds to the concept of “territorial peacebuilding” in counter-narrative to industrial peace or the need for state intervention. Indeed, the vision of the new publics and re-imagined economies that Alfredo and his colleagues articulate works against local orders of political and economic power that have benefitted from economic structures that simultaneously disenfranchise most Colombians and victimize millions while driving so many others to illicit economies or joining armed groups (Nixon 2013). Their vision for peace is in direct subversion of an industrial peace, and they are re-appropriating the concept of “territorial peacebuilding,” through shared economies and collective redistribution of wealth and profits. The Platform insists that this communal enterprise is territorial because central to a new public, is a new commons; the antithesis to hoarding and private property.

For Alfredo and the colleagues at the Javeriana, territorial peacebuilding is rooted in the second distinct element in the Colombian peace agreement, and that is land reform. Distribution of land and conflicts over its use and access have been fueling the Colombian armed conflict for decades, hence the first article in the Final Agreement establishes a route for reform that seeks to respond to the deep inequality in access and propriety of land, and

the commitment to territorially specific development plans that are endogenous, sustainable, and center the needs of campesino, Indigenous, and Afro-descendent communities and communities of victims of the armed conflict. For Alfredo and the Platform, land itself is a subject of rights, and the territories of the communities that participate in the Platform, including the re-incorporated former combatants, are understood as living ecosystems that require care, protection, and sustainable agricultural practices. As such, the Platform engages with processes of agricultural production that prioritize local, alternative markets, models of social economic commercialization that foregrounds the needs of families and community members before profits, and are committed to providing food to local school and social projects (Acevedo Lasso, et al. 2023). The position of the Platform aligns with the programs for rural reform set out in the peace agreement, including the promised re-distribution of 3 million hectares of land and titles through the newly created Land Fund and the establishment of a land registry through the newly established National Land Agency.

The land that Alfredo and the Platform are farming and developing for housing, community living, and eco-tourism came from the Land Fund and is land that the community members of the Platform understand not as an extractable resource, but as a co-collaborator in the work for peace with justice and equity. For example, for many Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, the land has been victimized in an extension of the victimization of the peoples who rely on the land for sustenance and survival. Restoring relations between groups of individuals towards the goals of peace must also incorporate reconciliation with and protection of the land as a subject of rights. This work of reconciliation with the land is inspired by legal precedent when, in 2016, the Colombian Constitutional Court formally recognized the Atrato River that runs through the western corridor of the country and provides a life-source to the many hundreds of communities that live along its banks, as a subject of rights unto itself and therefor having rights to protection and agency (Peña 2022). The concept of territorial peacebuilding, then, for the Platform, operates in stark contrast to the agro-industrial models of development that rely on technical “approaches to peacebuilding that objectify the environment as a separate, commodifiable entity” (Lederach 2017, 595) and depend on extractive logics. In this sense, as Angela Lederach illustrates in her work with communities in the Caribbean coastal region of Colombia, these community-based and endogenous appropriations of “territorial peacebuilding” provide alternatives to “technical peacebuilding programs, developed on desks outside the territory and later implemented by external ‘experts’” (2017, 596). Just as Lederach finds the rationale for peacebuilding from within territories, communities, and grassroots movements that have been working at peacebuilding for years, amidst ongoing violence, the community members of the Platform in Cauca also insist that sustainable peace is only possible when the knowledge and expertise of local actors is located within networks of cooperation that center alternative, and socially oriented economies.

Lastly, the focus of the 2016 Final Agreement that makes it especially unique is the emphasis on victims’ rights and recognition. The general focus of the agreement is dedicated to four elements of victims’ rights through the formation of the Integral System for Truth, Justice, Reparations and Non-Repetition, which includes the establishment of an independent transitional judicial system (the Special Justice for Peace Tribunal), the establishment of a Truth Commission, the Unit for the Search of Disappeared Persons, and mechanisms of

reparations and guarantees for non-repetition. Within this institutional architecture for peace, the focus on victims provides provisions for reparations and access to land and resources for local and endogenous strategies for development. This framework has been the partial inspiration for the Platform, together with accompaniment from the Javeriana university, to appropriate spaces not only for imagining new and alternative economic practices, but also for political education, strengthening of productive infrastructures that are sustainable and operate in alignment with the territorial protections, as well as training in advocacy and social dialogues that bring historically opposed groups together in spaces for reconciliation and community building at a local, territorial level. Again, the ways in which the platform imagines territorial peacebuilding contrasts significantly from the industrial peace model that is championed by some of the traditional sites of power in the country. While this generates debate and conflict in the political realm, the centrality of a re-imagined economics, to guarantee protection of the land, operate in reciprocal relationship within localized territories, and through alliances of solidarity and shared local development plans stand in contrast to the force of traditional capitalist extractivist models that have not only been ineffective at creating comprehensive social and economic equality, but have in many ways fueled the conflict in Colombia. The subversion of the industrial peace model toward imagined futures that conceptualize both well-being and the public realm differently, are where the religious rubrics of rebirth and sacralized spaces of ritual and becoming operate in the creation of new publics.

Necrofinance and Its Alternatives

There is a complicated ethic at the heart of the entrepreneurial zeal of Alfredo and the Platform's commitment to mixed economies that create space for some capitalist forms—an ethic of market economics that must also be considered in the analysis of economic change as the route for political and moral change. Reliance on an already unjust and violent economic structure seems inevitable as the platform members tell us about searching out markets, turning profits, and developing strategies for commercialization of the goods and products they are producing. The entrepreneurial subjectivity that peacebuilding through “just economies” constructs remains problematic in some ways as it seems to acquiesce to historical systems of exploitation. This is because, as Bartel has written elsewhere, “daily existential threats to life in Colombia produce specific arrangements of subjectivity that are at once the product of internalized methods and procedures of governance, while also accompanied by the relentless possibility of violence or elimination. Everyday life in Colombia is marked by aspirational faith as much as by the necropolitics of financialization, or what Bartel calls the *necrofinance* of late financial capitalism” (2021, 14).

The concept of necrofinance references the work of Cameroonian philosopher, Achille Mbembe, who writes of the “becoming subject,” and the fact that “war . . . has become the sacrament of our times” (2019, 13). Mbembe's work builds upon and challenges of the Foucauldian project, a project Mbembe accuses of a normative arc towards an idea of the (Western) “full subject”: individuals capable of self-understanding, self-consciousness, and self-representation without a deeper analysis of the structures of power that might limit such an ideal of selfhood, or the possibility that the ideal of selfhood might be eclipsed by ideals of collective subjectivities and other forms of subjectivities. The Foucauldian idea that modern bio-power produces “fully useful individuals” and operates as the master bio-organizer is

critiqued from the underside of modern power by Mbembe, who asserts that in the shadows of modernity (and colonial, imperial violence) live the majority of the world's people whose livelihoods are so often reduced to bare life and survival. These include the internally displaced populations of Afro-descendent, Indigenous, and campesino in Colombia numbering over 6 million currently; those Colombians whose lives take place in a "state of siege," or proximity to constant threats of violence, which has created a life of deep emotional and economic precarity; and the many other millions of victims of Colombia's war who are still seeking the paths towards peaceful lives, without fear and with dignity.

Indeed, the campaign slogan for Colombia's new Vice President—the country's first Afro-Colombian VP, and the first VP who is a lawyer coming from activist roots, and also worked as a maid for a time, the formidable Francia Marquez—was "*Vivir Sabroso*," an idea rooted in Afro-Colombian philosophy that roughly translates as "Living Well," or, more literally, "Living Deliciously," implying a life of economic and political stability, with space for leisure and meaningful relationships, free from fear or intimidation, with full regard for all political, cultural, social, and economic rights.¹⁶ Necropolitics operates in direct opposition to *vivir sabroso*. The new government in Colombia, and the many thousands of peacebuilders throughout the country, have been demanding a claim to a moral and ethical change that Colombia will require for a full realization of peace. Alfredo and his platform understand the ethico-economic work of communal economies as part of the strategy towards living well. Indeed, for Alfredo, this new time for Colombia, and for himself as one of those who made it down from the mountains alive, is like a resurrection. A new lease on life.

The connection between the moral change of living well and in peace and becoming integrated subjects of alter-publics through economies of reconciliation lies in the metaphorical possibilities of resurrection and the new life that born-againness promises. And, in Colombia narratives of resurrection abound. Indeed, in the days after the ratification of the peace accords in 2016, the country's Office for the Postconflict (*Oficina del Postconflicto*) unveiled a program and slogan for disseminating the details of the accords throughout the country, and named it "*Colombia Renace/Colombia is born again*."¹⁷ The government organized "*ferias*" or fairs in all departments and municipalities to highlight the plan for the post-conflict, and called them "*Ferias Colombia Renace/Colombia Born Again Fairs*." Up until last year, for example, the department of Cordoba celebrated the event "Córdoba Renace: A celebration of economic reactivation," an entrepreneurial symposium that showcased local businesses and a job fair. Even the popular coffee chain, *Juan Valdez*, promoted a new line of coffee products that designate a portion of profits to regions in the country that have been affected by violence. The coffee line is called *Renacer*, or "Born again." In the political imagination that produces a

¹⁶ The philosophy of "*Vivir Saboroso*" originates in the Colombian Pacific region of Chocó where, as Colombian scholar of Afro-Colombian thought, Angela Emilia Mena Lozano (2022) states, "the concept is influenced by life on riverways, encouraging us to be in constant movement and transition; the philosophy speaks to ideas of resistance and re-existence, the sense of family, not only through biological connections, but also extended ideas of family; in other words, community. However, the philosophy also insists that we can disagree, we can be on opposite sides of the river, but within a world of black and white, we should seek out the grey zones, the points of contact where our lives are interwoven and we can disagree without needing to eliminate the Other."

¹⁷ The word, *renacer* could alternatively be translated as "reborn."

model of a born-again state, the fairs and sales pitches serve cross-purposes of disseminating information as well as cultivating hope in the possibility of a resurrected nation. Such curated aspirations lead to a deeper consideration of the affective pulls of becoming, both spiritually as well as economically.

Insofar as we draw attention to the desires for becoming—something better, something different, something else—we consider the aspiration towards becoming peaceful actors and communities as a mode of subjectivity that is undetermined, malleable, and exists within the realm of possibility that is also inherently precarious. The aspiration *to become*, in Colombia, is tethered to both a Christian conception of the power of resurrection, and the power of collective action to organize the desires that drive communal economic projects and new economies all in the name of peace (Biehl and Locke 2017). To bring this emphasis on collective action into focus trains ethnographic attention on the potential of not only individual desires and aspirations, but communal aspirations to *become new kinds of publics*. The Platform offers a model of subjectivity that is both a process and a shared action, as opposed to individual subjectivities. The proposal provides an alternative to Western desires of individual completion through personal realization or industrialized models of capitalist peace, and rather orients all processes towards the realization of a new public sphere—a public where all members of society can live, exist, and have their full being recognized as subjects of rights and dignity. There is no individual subjectivity separate from the collective. Society, the economy, the public exists only insofar as the collective is well.

Such ethnographic focus foregrounds desiring, imagining, and hoping as practices of dissent, which engender a politics of potentiality that counters the moral bankruptcy of late financial capitalism in a subversive imaginarium through re-arranging relations of power. For Alfredo, and for the Colombian peacemakers, the challenge also sits in reference to Mbembe's assertion that "politics is the work of death," by re-imagining politics of the twenty-first century as the work of creating the conditions for a politics of life, of "buen vivir" or "living well." In the Platform, the principles of social economies, solidarity-based economies, and inter-co-operation foreground "social and community relations above material benefit" (Acevedo Lasso, et al. 2023, 12). In the facilitated spaces for dialogue at the Hegoa Institute of the Basque Country University, communities have developed strategic plans and life projects that operate in accordance with the values of "buen vivir." These shared principles and opportunities all contribute to the broader goals of achieving "the good life" and community-based peace, while processes such as the Platform strengthen local economies driven by the need for social, territorial, and communitarian re-incorporation strategies that create new publics, rooted in shared moral imaginings. This, of course, requires a significant force of faith. Indeed, the religious rubrics that drive visions of a new Colombia, a resurrected Colombia, a just Colombia are deeply embedded within discourses and practices of believing the country, and the economy, otherwise.

The aspirational force tied to the proposal of a new Colombia plays on the political imaginaries sustained by the proponents of both prosperity and peace accords—Colombia becoming reborn, one soul at a time, is as much a vision of a new and peaceful country as it is the promotion of the *communitas* that will make it so. The collective moral imaginary of what peace actually means is embryonic. There is no national consensus on what a truly peaceful country could be—but the roadmap of the 2016 peace accords is a crucial organizing

document and has a fundamentally unique characteristic: the accords are centered around the interests and needs of victims. The lives interrupted by war and precarity are re-imagined through the designs of a fledgling moral economy. The battle is uphill, to be sure. However, the commitment to becoming something new, and importantly, something collective, is the force that drives the discourses of abundance that people like Alfredo traffic in—hopefully to some degree of fruition.

The Underside of Peace: Prosperity as Protection

This brings us to an accompanying dynamic of imagining the economy, and Colombia, otherwise: the reality of on-going and evolving violence and the on-going task of protection. In this context, protection and its many manifestations is a foundational social practice that forms subjectivities “under duress” (Hunter-Bowman 2022), or fulfills social, political, and economic drives for connection and sovereignty. Protection—of the self, the community, the city, the land, or other forms of the commons—by non-state actors in contexts of prolonged, on-going, and perpetually shifting forms of violence makes up a significant dimension of the everyday practices and strategies of individuals and their personhood. Protection and the anthropological inquiry thereof, has not received sufficient attention, although the work of Jatin Dua (2019) on maritime protocols of protection and security is a notable exception. Nor has the idea of protection received due consideration in the field of the study of religion, yet it is a strategy of living often shot through with religious imaginaries, artefacts, discourses, and other practices.

This is not the same line of inquiry as the anthropological literature on religion and security (O’Neill 2015) or the broad literature on international relations, human security, and religion (Wellman and Lombardi 2012; Lucius 2013; Mandeville and Seipel 2021). Much work has been done attempting to pry apart religion, on the one hand, and security on the other. Yet, as Kevin O’Neill succinctly states, “religion is a social fact, deeply bound to the practice and to the construction of security, the very idea of what it means to be secure” (2015, 11). We suggest considering the concept and practices of prosperity and protection along those same lines, with religion operating as a social fact, weaving in and out of a series of imaginings, discourses, and practices that create a sense of being protected, from this-worldly threats as well as those of a more super-natural character.¹⁸

What is central to our argument is the site and space of economics thought otherwise, and the aspirational pulls of becoming that draw individuals and communities into economic relations other than exploitative, profit driven, financializing capitalist forms. We also suggest

¹⁸ There are significant differences between concepts of protection and security. Protection is concerned with a social process; an on-going series of practices, words, and use of artefacts (weapons, shrines, relics, icons, and otherwise), in the face of an on-going threat, primarily collective. While security might be understood as a conclusion, something that settles once the threat has evaporated, or a form of encompassment, fortification perhaps, in the aftermath of violence. Protection, and its foregrounding, makes sense in and of contexts where on-going, prolonged, and systemic violence of many kinds is a part of everyday life—as is the case in Colombia. Here we understand protection as a constellation of practices, strategies, beliefs, and material technologies and tools, that evoke *sensations* and *perceptions* of protection, even if, and perhaps especially, if there is no possibility of a guarantee of protection, and the only guarantor is God—or the community. The re-imagination of the “public” is central to rethinking protection as collective practice, rather than the work of external forces.

that, in a conversation on religion and public life and the imbrication of religion and economy in driving moral change, we consider the formation of subjects whose personhood is grounded in an idea of living a protected life, a peaceful life, especially if that protection is tied to economic sovereignty and stability.

An example from the Platform further illustrates this dynamic: Gathered around the plastic table, sitting on plastic chairs, in the cool shade, out of the hot afternoon sun in Santander de Quilichao, in the department of Cauca, Colombia, I (Rebecca) looked around in a moment of realization and muted astonishment. Representatives from Indigenous communities, Afro-Colombian communities, campesino groups, women's collectives, and cooperatives of former FARC guerrilla combatants laughed and joked and discussed their respective entrepreneurial endeavors. Just a few months prior, travel to the region had been cancelled because of the vigorous combat between drug cartels, paramilitaries, and remobilized guerrilla factions.¹⁹ Only a few years ago, this scenario of victims' organizations sitting at a table and joking with former guerrilla members had seemed impossible. Now, I sat and listened to members from some of the two-dozen organizations that make up the Platform, articulate their economic philosophy as a central component to the fulfillment of the peace accords.

At one point in the meeting, the legal representative of one of the Afro-Colombian collectives, a trained economist, explained to me that one of the great challenges to sustainability the collective faces is commercialization and market access. Fairly traditional business logic, to be sure. Yet the ideal of sustainability here is entangled intimately with ideals of becoming economically viable, even profitable, in order to sustain permanence on ancestral lands (not being displaced), dissuade the communities from engaging with the always present temptation/threat of the narco-industry (through coca production, trafficking, and so on), as well as live a dignified, prosperous life. A functional and equitable economy was a path to ethical life, and protected life. For this economist, "economy" was an empty signifier; not capitalist, but also not anti-capitalist, open to be filled with meaning. "If capitalism," he said, "opens a market for us in order to sell our products, that is something we can take advantage of. But *we* do that. Ourselves. And a sustainable economy as well as a sovereign economy can move us towards transformation from capitalism, but we might need to rely on capitalist relations even as we create new forms of exchange, transaction, and investment. A sustainable economy is the only way to reconciliation."

For the Platform, entrepreneurial activity itself is an act of becoming and an act of faith. Like for Alfredo, an ethical marketplace and community-oriented business enterprise served the dual purposes of protection and prosperity. Prosperity operates as a form of protection, especially within the layered rubrics of religious life and economic aspirations, in the context of a precarious peace. As the Platform leaders themselves state, "We have created the Platform

¹⁹ Since the signing of the peace agreement, there has been a notable shift in the dynamics of internal conflict. Some groups of demobilized FARC members have taken up arms again, narco-mafias have moved into regions where the FARC had historically had a stronghold and there have been increased conflict between competing criminal organizations. Paramilitary groups and active guerrilla militias that have yet to demobilize (like the National Liberation Army—ELN, or dissident FARC columns that never demobilized) also vie for domination of strategic territories and transport routes for drug trafficking and the illicit arms trade (Niño 2023).

to be a permanent space of transformation that responds to the communal needs of the community organizations represented through [sustainable and social] productive economic practice” (Acevedo Lasso, et al. 2023, 15).

Conclusion

I (Rebecca) sat amongst the former guerrilla, the *campesino* collectives, the Indigenous *cabildos* who explained to me that their community was destroyed on multiple occasions by FARC-EP crossfire, and the Afro-descendants who have been so particularly wounded by historical and systemic violence of globalizing capitalism, all of them were looking only to the future and treading lightly in the territories of the (recent and distant) past. I observed here a commitment to “the new” that is being built upon relationship, reconciliation, and not a little bit of conviction that the true harbingers of Colombia’s peace will be, as newly minted VP Marquez calls them, “los y las nadies,” the “nobodies”—the marginalized, the excluded, and the poor. I am reminded of the emancipatory undercurrent of Brazilian sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos’ well-worn phrase: “It is as difficult to *imagine* the *end* of *capitalism* as it is difficult to *imagine* that *capitalism* has no *end*.” Colombia’s peacebuilders are doing that work of imagining. It is the work of becoming, the work of moral change towards a more ethical life. To consider this moral imagination is an invitation to zoom out and recall the words of Robin Kelly who urges the critic, the scholar, and the activist to move beyond critique, and also engage in the work of imagining a new vision; an economy otherwise and a reimagination of personhood itself.

There is a politics to this entrepreneurial subjectivity that the peacebuilders articulate as at once a strategy of protection and a strategy of prosperity. The logic of universal access to prosperity supports this moral shift from victimhood to sovereignty; from insurgent to peacebuilder; from precarious to prosperous. To think prosperously is to consciously foreground potential and aspiration. When considering “discourses of abundance” through the categories of becoming and a particular subjectivity that relies on faith in enough-ness, a broader process of collective promising becomes evident—in other words, a truly political—and we suggest, ethical—act can be traced.

In the messy emergence of a nation rebuilding itself, one entrepreneur, one soul, and one community at a time, in this strange moment of the early twenty-first century, wisdom and newness emerge from communities of the historically overlooked and under-recognized, like Alfredo, former FARC combatants, and the communities of victims who are engaged in an economics of reconciliation; they are imagining anew, for they must. Alfredo and the peace communities in Colombia are practicing a dissident hope, reliant on a conviction that there is enough to go around, there need only be a re-imagining of what the economy can, and should, be. Believing that the possibility for “living well” can be achieved through economies of solidarity and reconciliation requires believing in what yet does not exist and relies on Christian tropes of new life and resurrected relationships. Just as peace was once only an imagined ideal and is now incarnate in so many movements towards it, so too an ethical economy is imagined as a strategy and a belief structure as it is yet still in construction. The proposal from so many of Colombia’s peace builders is that peace must be imagined and believed to be possible before it can be constructed; here the possibility of alternative economies, based in principles of social economies and inter-co-operation, makes real and tangible the possibilities of a new nation

and a new public. The approach to new publics and their audiences, as new political subjects, highlights the need to achieve peace in a comprehensive manner (positive, negative and cultural peace) from a moral perspective where aspirations and hope for peace allow significant advances can take place in commitment to a localized and, necessarily, imperfect peace. I (Katerine) believe that Colombia and these new audiences have a lot to show and teach the world, especially that there is no single recipe for peace and that we continue to imagine and build possible futures for peace and are committed to the idea that reconciliation is possible. Even in the midst of ongoing combat and the alarming figures of patterns of violence in the current armed conflict, hope for peace emerges. As Farid, a community leader from the Platform states, “peace is a butterfly that is beautiful but very fragile”; In that sense, peace calls us to think about it, and put it into action, from where we find ourselves as a university, groups, and individuals. We reiterate the permanent question that peace researchers must ask ourselves: How do I/we contribute to peace? Through the support and accompaniment of these productive-economic-political processes that arch towards reconciliation and peace, within the fine space between skill and art, in alliance between community-public-private cooperation, Alfredo, alias Nider, and the Platform for Peace work towards peace and new economics, without risking their own eternal souls in the process, just as Nider the Reformer imagined morally sound business through religious reform. The revolution is religious as is the moral imagination that sustains ideas of new publics in Colombia.

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